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ABSTRACT

The Assignment: Media Literacy curriculum is a 6-module media literacy curriculum developed by Renee Hobbs of Babson College and her staff in collaboration with the Discovery Channel. There are three versions of Assignment: Media Literacy, one for elementary school students, one for middle school students, and one for high school students. Close evaluation of the curriculum, watching teacher training and its use by teachers piloting the curriculum in Maryland, and assessing both student and teacher response leads to the conclusion that the curriculum is very well designed, user friendly, and well supported by teacher guidance materials. Importantly, the curriculum has been designed to closely align with and succeeds in supporting many of the Maryland State Content Standards for language and visual arts; social studies, and health, as well as theater and music. The curriculum offers a good mix of reading, writing, listening, viewing, and production activities for students at each of the three levels. From both the teachers' and students' reports, before and after delivery of the curriculum, it has been concluded that the curriculum was very well received and effective in both changing attitudes and in increasing media knowledge. Limitations of the efficacy of the curriculum are largely related to issues such as limited teacher training in media literacy and the fact that some teachers did not roll out the entire curriculum. Appendixes contain information on general demographics, changes in media use from fall to spring, differences by school and teacher emphasis, a methodological note, and a discussion of a hard finding to explain. (NKA)

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Final Evaluation of

ASSIGNMENT: MEDIA LITERACY

A Report to the Discovery Channel

November 13, 2001

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Executive Summary

Overall, we found solid and strong evidence that the **Assignment: Media Literacy (AML)** curriculum can help students in fulfilling the goals of media literacy instruction as well as reaching the curricular objectives of the Maryland State Content Standards. The curriculum addresses a wide range of important, fundamental media literacy goals.

The curriculum is well designed in its linkage to state curricular frameworks and it was very well designed for ease of use by teachers. Teachers who used the curriculum were very pleased with the curriculum and expect to use it in the future. They have shared it with other teachers, and report that their students responded extremely well to these media literacy lessons. The quantitative data collected from the teachers as well as their open-ended self reports are extremely positive in regard to most every aspect of **Assignment: Media Literacy.**

From both the teachers' reports and those of the students, before and after delivery of the curriculum, we have concluded that the curriculum was very well received and effective in both changing attitudes and in increasing media knowledge. Students enjoyed the curriculum and reported that they had become more critical about the media. Evidence also demonstrates that the students learned from the curriculum in significant ways, e.g., they obtained an increased and appropriate skepticism about the claims of advertisers and increased caution with regard to the veracity of information on the Internet.

The full report below outlines where the curriculum seems to have worked most effectively and in some instances may not have obtained all of its goals. Limitations in the efficacy of the curriculum are largely, if not entirely, related to issues such as limited teacher training in media literacy and the fact that some teachers did not roll out the entire curriculum. Hence, many students did not receive all of the six modules that were designed. Without direct control over teachers, it cannot be guaranteed that every teacher who expressed interest in AML would necessarily use every or, in some instances, even most modules. As will be seen, the students in the one school where the entire curriculum was delivered performed best.

Other limitations in the piloting of AML involved limited technological and personnel support for the teachers at the schools where they teach. These problems can be linked entirely to specific problems in schools and school districts, funding, and the like, and do not reflect in any way on the AML curriculum. In our view, while some modules could perhaps be improved, overall the curriculum is excellent, varied, and properly designed for the age grades involved.

Assignment: Media Literacy was a real success. Both teachers and students received it very well. Limitations that we have detected go more to matters of logistics, management, and roll out than to the curriculum itself.

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The Discovery Channel can be rightly proud of its critical role in sponsoring the development and implementation of this very innovative and substantive media literacy curriculum, one that well addresses many of the Maryland State Content Standards. Moreover, the curriculum articulates well with the Core Curricular Standards in most every other state in the U.S. In our view, therefore, Assignment: Media Literacy can be appropriately disseminated to school districts and states throughout the United States.

The Curriculum

The Assignment: Media Literacy curriculum is a six-module media literacy curriculum developed by Prof. Renee Hobbs of Babson College and her staff in collaboration with the Discovery Channel. There are three versions of Assignment: Media Literacy, one for elementary school students, one for middle school students, and one for high school students.

Our close evaluation of the curriculum, watching teacher training and its use by teachers in Maryland, and assessing both student and teacher response leads us to conclude that the curriculum is very well designed, user friendly, and well supported by teacher guidance materials.

Importantly, the curriculum has been designed to closely align with and succeeds in supporting many of the Maryland State Content Standards for language and visual arts (e.g. acquisition and application of new vocabulary; comprehension and analysis; perceiving and responding; understanding historical, cultural, and social contexts; and aesthetic criticism) social studies, and health, as well as theater and music. The curriculum does a good job of facilitating deeper learning for a great many of these standards. Moreover, the introduction to each of the six units for each level of schooling indicates which specific instructional objectives are developed in that unit. Many teachers commented very positively on the close linkage between the Assignment: Media Literacy curriculum and the state content standards.

The curriculum offers a good mix of reading, writing, listening, viewing, and production activities for students at each of these age levels. The curriculum has also been well designed for contemporary students, with contemporary media in mind, including the Internet, and also seems well calibrated for the different cognitive and affective development levels associated with each of these age levels in school.

The Elementary School Assignment: Media Literacy Curriculum is designed to help students to understand: how the media attract and hold attention, journalistic values and issues of media accuracy, how the media represent, and can misrepresent, an individual or group depending on the slant of a story and the words chosen to tell the story, TV and movies reviews and the ratings system and how to read a television guide (promoting more discriminating viewing), how heavy media use can

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interfere with a person achieving their goals and what healthy alternatives there are to media use.

The Middle School Assignment: Media Literacy Curriculum is designed to help students to understand point of view and target audience, how media violence is constructed and how it distorts reality, how media realism is achieved, how stereotyping occurs in sports and other media genres, and as with the elementary students whether heavy media use can interfere with a person achieving their goals.

The High School Assignment: Media Literacy Curriculum is designed to help students to understand: how authenticity and authority of media messages is achieved, how the news media's coverage of crime affects our perceptions of reality and our beliefs about the criminal justice, connections between journalism, history and literature, and the culture of celebrity and how media celebrities shape our expectations of ourselves and the world around us.

The Teachers

Demographics

Out of 215 teachers we first encountered in the teacher training sessions in fall of 2000, 78 returned a mailed survey to us in June 2001 (the first mailing went out in May, a follow-up in mid-June). Out of these 78 teachers, 43 had used AML while 35 had not. Note: the actual number responding to some questions will dip below 43 in those instances when some teachers did not reply to the question.

Most of the 78 teachers were very experienced. Nearly 40% had 21+ years of teaching experience, 23% had between 11 and 20 years experience, and the remaining 36% had between 1 and 10 years experience. Only 15% had less then five years experience.

Three quarters were female. Eighty-five percent described themselves as classroom teachers, 6.5% as librarians, and the rest were administrators or denoted themselves as "other".

Over half of the teachers were from rural school districts; the remaining teachers were about evenly split between urban and suburban schools. The urban teachers were the most likely to have delivered the curriculum.

About half the teachers were elementary school teachers and the remaining teachers were evenly split between middle school and high school. A mid-year sample, in January, showed that roughly one-third of teachers taught health and physical education, roughly one-third taught English, and another third or social studies or related subjects.

Coverage of Modules, Teachers are Selective in Use

We next focus on the 55% of teachers in the spring survey who *did* report using AML. We asked the teachers if they had used more than half, less than half, or none of each of the six modules for their grade level. Typically, only about a third of teachers reported using over half of any given module, another third typically reported using less than half of a module, and another third reported not using any of a particular module. Only for module one did over half (64%) report using at least half of that module. Only 13% reported not using any of module 1. We will see again when we examine specific classrooms and student responses that different teachers delivered varying amounts of the curriculum.

How Did Teachers Respond?

Teachers Respond Very Favorably

Overall, the teachers responded very enthusiastically to Assignment: Media Literacy. All of the teachers who used AML reported that they were now more enthusiastic about media literacy as a subject area. Over 50% "strongly agreed" that they were more enthusiastic. Another positive sign is that 62% reported that they had shared AML curriculum with other teachers.

All but one of the 43 teachers who used Assignment: Media Literacy agreed with the statement that that they "would introduce more media literacy materials in their classes in the future." Almost 50% strongly agreed with this statement.

Ninety-three percent of the teachers agreed that media literacy activities enabled them to make the subject they taught more interesting. Eighty-five percent of the teachers reported that media literacy enables them to communicate and interact with more students.

Only 13% agreed with the statement that "media literacy is overrated" and 8 of these 10 teachers only slightly agreed with that statement. Eighty-seven percent disagreed with the statement.

Sixty-nine percent of teachers agreed with the statement that media literacy was a better approach to teaching than many with which they were familiar. Ninety-three percent of teachers reported that media literacy is a tool that helps students with learning other tasks, such as writing.

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Teachers Also Report Very Favorable Student Response

All but one of the 41 teachers who used AML agreed that their students had become better critical thinkers. Teachers also believe that students are made more skeptical of advertising as a result of the AML Curriculum. Ninety-three percent of the teachers reported that this was so. This finding is in line with one of the stronger effects we will present later, i.e., that the students report that they themselves are more critical of advertising.

Thirty-eight percent of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that their students had become "much more critical about their television viewing" as a result of the curriculum. Forty-eight percent slightly agreed. Only 15% disagreed.

Eighty-five percent of teachers agreed that their students are more enthusiastic about learning as a result of being introduced to media literacy. Sixty-four percent of teachers agreed or slightly agreed that their students were writing more as a result of the AML curriculum.

The teachers generally reported that students responded "very favorably" between 60 and 70% of the time to each of the modules. In nearly all instances, the remaining 30-40% reported that students had found the module "favorable." Only rarely did a teacher report unfavorable student response to a module.

Teachers' Open-Ended Opinions & Experiences with the Curriculum and with Students

The teachers were very satisfied with the curriculum. As one teacher wrote, *"I was very pleased with the curriculum. Students seemed to really like the activities."* Another teacher wrote: "*I think the curriculum is wonderful. The students really enjoy the hands-on production activities."*

For some teachers and their students, Assignment: Media Literacy is a downright hit. One teacher reported that *"When the students see me with the Assignment: Media Literacy binder, their eyes light up. They look forward to it, I can tell."*

Another teacher shared a similar experience*: "Students look forward to doing the activities in the curriculum and especially the video clips. They ask me if we will be doing media stuff in class."*

She went on: "*This is a way to encourage learning in a fun way. It's as if the students aren't aware that they are actually learning because it's fun for them."*

One teacher was particularly impressed with the elementary school lesson wherein students learn how different narration, along with the exact same visual material in a documentary, can radically change how people thing of a particular group, in this case,

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pirates. *"Students were surprised that you could have a voice over change the meaning of something. They really liked the activity."*

One teacher focused on the journalism unit because it *"encouraged students to question where the news actually comes from. It's something that most students usually take for granted."*

Another teacher offered this observation: *"Students had a lot of fun with the 'What Grabs You' activity. They realized that each medium was special, and used different techniques to gain attention."*

Some teachers have come to appreciate the curriculum the more they've worked with it. Wrote one teacher: *"Now that I am familiar with how to use the program, I am able to use videos, TV programs, and tapes and create activities to fit my students' needs. "*

Home Front

There is also evidence that the curriculum is reaching the home front. One teacher wrote that: *"The students enjoyed knowing what the ratings meant and how they are applied. The students enjoyed sharing this information with other family members and deciding together what shows were appropriate to watch."*

Teachers Laud Linkage to State Content Standards

Teachers appreciated the articulation with Maryland's State Content Standards. One teacher, reporting back about Assignment: Media Literacy said: *"We find the step-by-step procedure, and the way the lessons are created, to be very user friendly. Especially because you have the unit overview with the Maryland content standards listed at the beginning. We know exactly how the activity fits into our lesson plans. We've been very satisfied with the curriculum. And, we believe it supports Maryland Content standards, especially the writing activities."*

Indeed, the importance of the congruence with the Maryland State Standards was recognized by a number of teachers. One wrote, *"I particularly like the correlation with Maryland Language Arts Content Standards. Media Literacy is now an integral element in my balanced Literacy program."* Another teacher wrote, *"All modules I-III, that I've used, have had positive responses because the material is current, correlates with Maryland Content Standards and provides authentic situations for students' interaction."*

Schools and Teachers Need More Technical Support

One problem the teacher encountered is with the personal and technical support for media literacy in schools. Fifty-seven percent of teachers reported that there were too few resources to integrate media literacy effectively. And nearly 60% agreed with the statement that the reward structure in their school does not recognize teachers integrating media literacy.

Regarding technology, nearly 90% of the teachers reported that the supply of editing equipment was inadequate in their school. Sixty-five percent said the supply of video cameras was inadequate. However, the majority of teachers believed that the supply of other communication technologies was adequate: computers (73.6% reported adequate supply), Internet access (70.4%), TV monitors (80%), VCRs (83.6%), and newspapers (73.2%).

Teacher Training

Teacher Training Good, but More Intense Workshops and Follow-Up Called For

Spring, 2001. Eight to nine months after they received their initial training, ninety-five percent of teachers reported that the teacher training they had received in the late summer and fall workshops had provided adequate preparation. However, over half (52%) reported that they would have liked longer, more extensive training. Over three-quarters, 77%, said that they would have found follow-up in-service workshops helpful.

Mid-year sample, January 2001. Over 85% of the 23 teachers surveyed in this small sub sample at mid-year in January of 2001 reported that the teacher training they had received adequately prepared them to teach the Assignment: Media Literacy curriculum. But nearly half of the teachers who had delivered portions of the curriculum agreed with the statement: "I would have liked a longer, more intensive initial teacher training." One teacher wrote, *"I believe that media literacy workshops should be at least 2 days, this way facilitators would be more able to take their time and explain the program."*

At mid-year, eighty percent of the teachers who did not deliver any of the curriculum indicated that they would have liked more training. We cannot discern whether more teacher training would have led more of these teachers to try out the curriculum or whether we are picking up a general "reporting characteristic" of some general negativism among these teachers who did not adopt the curriculum.

Response to Fall Teacher Training Workshops

Of the 196 teachers who completed a teacher survey in late summer and early fall at the end of the teacher training sessions, over three quarters gave the in-service training an excellent or superior rating. Twenty percent gave the training a "good" and only 2.6% reported that the training was only fair. Evaluation by the teacher trainers themselves also indicated very high approval and satisfaction with the training sessions

In late summer and early fall, all of the teachers surveyed indicated that they would introduce some of the curriculum in the 2000-01 school year. Thirty percent indicated that they expected that they would introduce all 6 Assignment: Media Literacy modules during the year. Twenty-two percent expected to deliver four or five modules. Twenty-six percent expected to introduce 3 modules, and the remaining 22% expected to only introduce one or two modules.

However, as noted, of the 78 teachers who completed the spring survey, just 55% had used the AML curriculum. This suggests optimism and the wish to give a positive answer immediately following the fall training workshop. It might indicate that had there been follow-up during the year, that perhaps more teachers would have introduced the curriculum.

The Students

How the Schools Were Chosen

The research design called for us to sample classes from a variety of different kinds of schools at both the 5th grade and 7th & 8th grade levels, making sure to include schools from suburban, urban, and rural districts. Surveys and test questions were administered to students both in the fall, before being introduced to the AML curriculum, and again in the spring, 8-9 months later.

Five schools, three elementary and two middle schools, participated in the evaluation of the AML curriculum. John Humbird Elementary and Bel Air Elementary are both located in rural Cumberland County. Two teachers from each school participated with their 5th grade classes. The remaining elementary school, Forest Knolls, is located in a suburban area of Montgomery County. One teacher implemented the curriculum with students in her 5th grade media classes.

The two middle schools studied were Barclay Elementary/Middle School, located in urban Baltimore City. One media teacher delivered selected portions of the curriculum to her eighth grade students. The fifth school, Middletown Middle School, is located in suburban Frederick County. One teacher delivered the curriculum to her two 7th grade language arts classes.

It is important to note that in deciding which schools and classrooms would be studied we intentionally sought out teachers who had impressed us at the teacher training sessions as being teachers who were enthusiastic about media literacy. We wanted the teachers to be ones who would cooperate with us as much as possible in helping us collect data when we were on site. And we wanted to maximize the potential of finding that the curriculum worked, at least in the hands of enthusiastic teachers.

Survey and Test Design

Two different survey/test instruments were used with the students. An attitudinal/opinion questionnaire asked between 25-30 6-point likert items (from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with no neutral point offered—we intentionally did not want subjects to pick the middle point, something subjects often do rather than position themselves as agreeing or disagreeing with one item or another) were given to both the elementary and middle school students in the fall of 2000 and spring of 2001. There were a few questions that were asked only of the middle schoolers and not of the elementary school children, hence the range (25-30). A second test instrument asked approximately 50 questions related to the curriculum's varied learning objectives.

Demographics

The students were nearly evenly divided, male and female. As explained in the appendix, we deliberately focused more of our student data collection effort on fifth graders, as we believed that we might see more change in this age group than in students who were 12-14. Thus, most of the students, nearly 70%, were in the 5th grade (see explanation and sample demographics in the appendices 1 and 4). The remaining 30% were in middle school with about 20% in 7th grade and the remaining 10% in 8th grade. In the fall, roughly 36% were age 10, 34% age 11, 6 age 12, 12% age 13, and 8% age 14.

Media Use in the Home, Television is Ubiquitous for these Students

We think it is important to provide the reader with a quick overview of the availability of media technology in these students' homes.

Over 50% of students surveyed reported four or more televisions in their home. Twenty-six percent reported three televisions, 14.5% reported two televisions, and 6.8% reported one television. Three students report no television set in the home. Nearly 56% of students reported having a television in their room.

Thirty-three percent reported a VCR in their room, 67% reported having a CD player in their room, 15.3% reported having a computer with Internet connection in their room and another 15.1% reported having a computer without an Internet connection in their room. Just under 30% of all students reported no Internet connection in the home. (For an analysis of changes in media use patterns, see Appendix 2.)

How Did Students Respond?

Students' Attitudes & Opinions

Students Report Positive Attitudes Toward Media Literacy Instruction and Believe They Have Become More Critical of the Media

In spring, in both elementary and middle school students, many signs point to young people responding quite favorably to the Assignment: Media Literacy curriculum. The vast majority of students agreed (78% from the Middletown Middle School sample) with the statement "Class is more interesting when the teacher uses examples from television, movies, or magazines."

Likewise, 78.3% *disagreed* with the statement "I don't like it when the teacher uses TV, commercials, and movies in class." Nearly three-quarters (73.1%) agreed that "I look forward to class when we use different forms of media."

Eighty-two percent agree with the statement "I've learned a lot about media in this class." Nearly 77% of students agreed that "I am more critical of media today than I was in the beginning of the year," with 32.6 % strongly agreeing.

Elementary Students are More Cautious about Advertising and the Internet. Less Change Observed in Middle School Students.

Advertising Less Trusted. The elementary school children were significantly ($p < .01$*) more likely to agree at Time 2 than at Time 1 that "I don't trust advertising very much."

> *** p values denote the probability that the observed result is due to chance. In this case, a p of less than .01 tells us that there is less than one chance in one hundred that the result is due to chance; $p < .05$ indicates that there is less than one chance in 20 [5 in 100] that the result is due to chance; and $p < .1$ denotes that there is less than one chance in 10 that the results are due to chance. In social science reporting, it is permissible to report that a finding is "significant" if $p < .05$. We report some findings of $p < .1$ because they are still of import in a study such as this especially one where the sample sizes were necessarily small (other things being equal, larger samples result in greater significance levels).**

The middle school students differed on a similar measure apparently as a result of which teacher they had and what he or she emphasized (see discussion of differential responses by school/teacher in Appendix 3). A related "likert" statement about advertising was only given to the middle school students: "Advertising frequently exaggerates how good a product is compared to what people actually get when they buy something." Students at Barclay Middle School agreed more at Time 2 than at Time 1, but students at Middletown agreeing less at Time 2 than at Time 1. Again, more findings on school differences is presented in Appendix 3.

Students Show More Internet Caution. Elementary school children were significantly ($p < .05$) more likely at Time 2 than at Time 1 to agree that "You can't believe some of what you see and read on the Internet. Things are faked sometimes." The middle schools, however, showed no change on this measure.

Where the Curriculum Was Most Successful and Students Changed the Most

Fifth grade students at Bel Air elementary school were introduced to all six units in the AML curriculum—the only school where students received the whole curriculum—and it is at Bel Air where we found the most consistent media literacy successes relative to all the other schools, and particularly in direct comparison with the other two elementary schools (Forest Knolls and John Humbird). At Bel Air, the two teachers and their respective classes devoted one period each week to the curriculum in support of the school's reading and language arts programs.

On likert agree-disagree items, the Bel Air students indicated more enjoyment learning about the media than did the students at Forest Knolls and John Humbird—although they also reported enjoying media lessons, and they also agreed more that the class was more interesting when the teacher uses examples from the media. And relative to the other two schools, by year's end, these students reported that they had become more critical about the media.

And students at Bel Air do appear to have become more critical and skeptical about the media. When asked "how often do you think things you see on TV mislead viewers," students moved from "sometimes" to "often" ($p < .1$). They were also quite likely to agree with the statement "you can't believe some of what you see and read on the Internet. Things can be faked sometimes." ($p < 1$).

Relative to the other two schools, Bel Air students also exhibit greater resistance to advertising. Students were more likely to disagree with the statement "I wish I owned a lot of things I see advertised on TV" ($p < 1$). They were also more likely to agree with the statement "I don't trust TV advertising very much." These findings are congruent with their increased awareness of the commercial influences on media production. At the end of the year, Bel Air students were more likely than the other students to agree with the statement "People who create media messages are influenced a lot by the need to make money" ($p < .01$).

The curriculum also seeks to raise with students the possibility that ingrained media habits and excessive use can be detrimental. It's our impression that the teachers at Bel Air emphasized this idea, perhaps beyond the AML curriculum itself—not an unusual thing for some media literacy teachers to do. By year's end, Bel Air students were more likely to agree with the statement: "I think using media too much can harm some people" ($p < .10$). They were also more likely to agree with the statement "Some people can become addicted to the media. They almost can't control their use" ($p <. 1$). These findings may have been amplified by the fact that students participated in their school's DARE program the same week the unit was taught in class. We are dubious about teachers equating drug abuse with media use, but they would not be the first to do so.

Overall, students at Bel Air showed the greatest change. We believe that commitment on the part of the teachers and their weekly use of the curriculum and integration of the AML modules with already existing school and state curriculum objectives is the best explanation for these observations.

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Knowledge & Understanding

Elementary School Students

A number of test items were given to the students in fall and again in spring.

One test involved showing the same video of brief clips before and after students received the curriculum. Each clip was about 10 seconds long and each showed a different kind of programming and asked students three questions about each clip.

Students were asked, using multiple-choice options, to identify the **program type** as well as the **intention** of the message (was the message designed to entertain, inform, or persuade? [multiple answers were deemed correct in response to particular clips]). A similar measure was used to appraise students' ability to identify **target audience**. These are among the most basic lessons in the Assignment: Media Literacy curriculum and are well covered in the first module. Most teachers introduced their students to these materials.

Program Type Identification Improves. In the fall, elementary students already demonstrated an ability to correctly identify different television program types (e.g. animation, comedy program, and commercial) typically scoring between 70 and 95% correct. Understandably on *these* more obvious program types there was little or no notable improvement from fall to spring.

In contrast, only 44% of fifth graders were able to correctly identify a 10-second *documentary* clip when viewed in the fall but nearly 66% correctly identified this program type in the spring. Students were also shown a brief clip of a soap opera in Spanish. This item was intentionally used to make identification of the soap opera "genre" more difficult. Fifty-seven percent of students correctly identified the program as a soap opera in the fall but 75% got it correct in the spring. The AML curriculum was probably responsible for most of the improvement on both these program types, but pure maturation at this age level might also be involved, but to a lesser degree.

Message Intention. Understanding that the documentary was intended to "inform" (vs. entertain or persuade) went up from 84% in fall to 93% in spring. On other measures of message intention, there was similar improvement of about 8-10 percentage points.

Target Audience Identification Improves. We found improvement in elementary students' ability to discern target audience. Students were shown a full 15-30 second ad and asked to fill in the different groups of people to whom the advertisement was targeted. Three ads were shown: one for Johnson & Johnson Baby Shampoo, one for Ambien (an over-the-counter allergy remedy), and one for Clearasil.

To assist the students they were given a list of possible answers: Adults, African Americans, Athletes, Babies, Boys, Bus Drivers, Children, Doctors, Fathers, Girls, Grown-ups, Hispanics, Kids, Men, Mothers, Parents, Old People, Sick People, Teachers, Teenagers, White People, Women.

Students were asked to "write the words that best describe the kinds of people whom you think they are trying to communicate with." Correct answers were then tallied.

Significant improvement was noted in the number of correct answers given in response to each ad. To clarify, with each ad, there were more than one or two possible correct answers. A single target audience is rarely intended in advertising.

Only 31% gave one or more correct answers in the fall in response to the baby shampoo ad, but 60% gave one or more correct answers in the spring. The percentage getting two or more correct for the Ambien ad went from 43% in fall to 56% in spring. The percentage giving two or more correct answers to the Clearasil ad doubled from 12% in the fall to 26% in the spring.

Reading & Understanding a TV Guide. One of the lessons in AML aims to teach students how to read and discern information from a typical TV guide listing such as those that appear in newspapers. The lesson teaches students that they can discern what the parental guidance rating on a program is, and in the case of movies, a quality rating as denoted by stars, e.g., a 3-star movie or a 4-star movie. Students are also expected to learn how to discern *when* a particular program is aired.

We gave the students an actual TV guide in the test materials, one very similar to the one used in the curriculum, and asked them to tell us when a particular program aired, what the rating for a particular program was, and the quality rating for a movie. The same TV grid was shown at Time 1 and Time 2 but slightly different--but equally challenging questions--were asked in fall and spring.

On the first two questions there was no real change, 96% of students were able to discern when a program aired at both Time 1 and Time 2. Seventy-nine percent were able to discern the parental guidance rating at both time one and time two. However, there *was* significant improvement in students' ability to discern the *quality rating*, moving up from 65% in the fall to 82% in the spring.

Who Creates the Media? We found improvement in students' understanding that many different kinds of skills are involved in the making of media products--in this case, an animated cereal ad. Understanding the jobs/roles that are involved/performed in media production is an important element in students understanding that there are people creating and making decisions behind every media presentation that they see or hear.

Many more students, roughly twice as many, were able to correctly indicate at Time 2 that a director (41% correct vs. 82% correct at Time 2) and writer (31% correct vs. 71%

correct at Time 2) were involved in the production of an animated ad. The percentage indicating that an editor was involved jumped from 50% to 76%.

Middle School Students' Knowledge & Understanding

Improvement in Understanding How Ads Attract and Hold Attention

In one test, middle school students were shown a 30-second television ad (a Wal-Mart back-to-school ad for new clothes) and asked to identify what techniques were used to attract and hold the viewer's attention, as well as what social values were contained within the ad. Student performance improved substantially and significantly from Time 1 to Time 2.

At Time 1, students averaged only 1.5 correct answers on how the ad attracted and held attention but generated more than twice as many correct answers (4 in number) at Time 2. At Time 1, only 24% of students gave three or more correct answers to how the ad attracted and held attention but in the spring, nearly 75% were able to generate three or more correct answers.

Students were also much more able to discern social values communicated in the ad at Time 2, moving from less than one accurate social value at Time 1 (.82) to 3.25 social values at Time 2. Thirteen percent were able to accurately discern two or more social values at Time 1 but 73% were able to accurately discern two or more social values at Time 2.

Improvement in Understanding the Language of Media Literacy

In another test, students were asked to match up definitions for the words: *script, composite character, sound bites, synopsis, producer, talking heads, archival footage, reenactment, animation, and documentary.* Although to adults, many of these terms may seem simple or obvious, they are among the basic conceptual building blocks of media literacy. One cannot readily discuss, analyze and critique media at higher levels without knowing the meaning of these and similar words. As with identifying program types and media production jobs with the elementary school students, understanding the concepts listed above are critical to students understanding that media messages are constructed.

We did a mid-year check in January with just one of the middle school teachers. At Time 1, students only knew the correct definition 31% of the time. In the winter, the same class got 59% correct and were thus nearly twice as accurate. These trends held up in our spring analysis as well.

Students demonstrated very substantial improvement on particular items, going from 13% to 35% in knowing what a "synopsis" was, 12 times as many knowing what a

"sound bite" was—going from 3% to 38%, and an increase from 13% to 63% in knowing the definition for a "teaser."

Where and Why Change Wasn't Always Found

Any research study starts with certain hypotheses as to what effects might be expected. This study was no exception. The section that follows explores some of the ways we tried to test for various hypotheses we had about change but where we found no change, or if there was change, that it went in the opposite direction than we expected.

When we reflect on some of the measures that did not show change, we can see where the curriculum, at least as delivered to the students we studied, appears not to have made inroads.

Materialistic Values and Understanding Commercial Imperatives. But for the exception of gains at the Bel Air elementary school, at Time 2, over 70% of students across all five schools still agreed with the statement "I wish I owned a lot of the things I see advertised on TV." Seventy-four percent agreed at Time 1 but the paired-T-test shows no difference whatsoever. In other words the slight drop from 74% to 70% is not at all significant.

And again, but for the Bel Air students, there was no change in response to the statement: "People who create media are influenced a lot by the need to make money." Granted about 80% agreed in both instances, but there was no increase in agreement at Time 2. Some might say that the statement implies a value judgment about the commercial imperative of much media and it is possible that teachers simply chose not to teach around this topic very much, although it seems a necessary part of media literacy lest students fail to understand how programs are constructed for a commercial market and to be the avenue by which audiences are exposed to advertising.

But neither was there increase across the entire sample in the strength of agreement with the statement: "People who create media messages do a lot of thinking about how to attract audiences with their messages." At least as revealed in this one statement, it does not appear that the curriculum, as delivered, got students more focused in understanding the process behind the making of commercial entertainment.

Noticing Detail. We also tested whether students became more cognizant of details in an ad from Time 1 to Time 2. In this test, students were shown a 15 second animated Supercharged Frosted Flakes ad featuring Tony the Tiger, once in the fall and again in the spring. Questions asked whether certain things were said in the ad, whether certain actions occurred, whether certain objects were shown, whether a particular kind of music was heard. Students viewed the ad twice before answering questions at both Time 1 and Time 2.

We found no evidence, at least as revealed with these sorts of questions and with regard to this single ad, that students had become more discerning or more aware of details in from fall to spring. The action in the ad moves very quickly and this may explain why students did not improve. At the same time, they had had even more exposure to the ad in spring than in fall from exposure during the study itself and some may have seen the ad between testing sessions as the ad was in release during the fall. However, the challenge to discern such elements may have been too great with this measure for this group.

Appendix 1

General Demographics

Gender

Male.....48.3%
Female.....51.6%

Grade

Elementary

5th.....69.5%

Middle School

7th.....18.8%
8th.....11.7%
Total.....30.5%

Ages at Time 1	*Time 2*
Age 9.....3.4%	
10.....56.7%	36.4%
11.....10.5%	33.8%
12.....16.0%	10.0%
13.....11.3%	12.1%
14.....2.1%.	7.8%

Appendix 2

Changes in Media Use from Fall to Spring

Radio listening and soap opera viewing increase. Video game play declines slightly. Reading books less well liked for middle school students in spring.

Media and other activity time-use grids were also given to students. These measures permitted us to see if there were changes in how often students watched TV, used the Internet, listened to the radio, read comic books, watched soap operas, spent time outside, read a book, etc.

One set of items, albeit a set almost certainly not related to the curriculum, and on which both age groups trended in the same direction, was how many hours--or how much time--was spent listening to the radio, watching soap operas, and how much they reported liking to read books.

The average amount of radio listening went up for both age two groups significantly and by about a half hour a day from Time 1 to Time 2. This is to be expected in these age groups and no doubt is largely or entirely a function of normal maturation in our society.

On the other hand, there was a slightly but non-significant drop in the number of hours spent playing videogames from Time 1 to Time 2. Both age groups reported a greater likelihood to agree at Time 2 than at Time 1 with the statement: "I like watching TV shows that I know my friends will want to talk about." This is not at all surprising especially given that the Time 1 data were collected when students didn't know each other as well in the beginning of the school year than 7-8 months later in the spring after a school year's worth of social interaction.

A disconcerting finding with the middle schoolers is that they were very significantly ($p < .005$) more likely at Time 2 than at Time 1 to disagree with the statement: "I like to read books," rising from a mean of 2.6 at Time 1 to 3.24 at Time 2 (larger numbers denote more disagreement with this statement). There was only a very slight and insignificant increase in disagreement on this item with the elementary school children.

While disconcerting, the finding is not surprising. In the younger years, kids are still getting turned-on to reading and are encouraged to read at school and at home and may also believe that it is cool to read or say that they like reading. Some in fifth grade may even still be read to by parents.

Not so with kids 13 and 14. We doubt very much that this is a result of the curriculum, but is a result of aging within this cohort. Perhaps it is a combined result of them actually disliking reading more as they are freed up to experience other media more and also of the wish to appear cool—even to themselves, i.e., reporting that they don't like to read, just like the kids around them. Still, even with a benign interpretation, the wish on the part of all too many contemporary students to appear disinterested in school to their age-mates is most unfortunate.

There is a slight but significant increase in soap opera viewing in both groups from Time 1 to Time 2. Generally, neither of these groups watches soap operas very often, but the trend is toward more viewing. And, along with other media, increased soap opera viewing and radio listening may help pull the older kids away from books.

Appendix 3

Differences by School and Teacher Emphasis

Understanding that Different People Interpret Media Messages Differently. Another statement that elicited varying responses was: "Individuals will interpret the same media messages differently." Significantly ($p < .01$) more Middletown middle school students agreed with this statement at Time 2 than at Time 1, but there was no change at Barclay Middle School. Similarly, there was significantly ($p < .05$) more agreement with the statement at Time 2 than at Time 1 at the Bel Air and John Humbird elementary schools, but no change at Forest Knolls elementary school.

We attribute these differences to what different teachers emphasized in the curriculum and how they delivered the curriculum, especially at Middletown Middle School as we were aware that the teacher there stressed the importance of recognizing that individuals will interpret media texts differently. Understanding that different individuals understand the same media message differently is an important concept in media literacy and also in reaching diversity goals in schools.

To complicate the picture further, the Forest Knolls students may have already been familiar with some basic media literacy principles insofar as Forest Knolls is a Communication Arts Magnet School and their curriculum focuses on integrating communication arts. In the case of this particular question about interpreting media messages, the Forest Knolls students started out at Time 1 at the same level of agreement as the John Humbird and Bel Air students reached at Time 2. But this was only the case in a few circumstances.

Believing that Media Use Can Interfere with Family Life. A similar trend, by teachers in the schools, is observed with the statement: "using media a lot can interfere with relationships in our families." Again, significantly ($p < .001$) more Middletown middle school students agreed with this statement at Time 2 than at Time 1, but there was no change at Barclay Middle School. Similarly, there was significantly ($p < .05$) more agreement with the statement at Time 2 than at Time 1 at the Bel Air and John Humbird elementary schools, but no change at Forest Knolls elementary school.

Appendix 4

Methodological Note

Why there are More Observed Differences Among Elementary School Students? A Function of Sample Size, Maturation, and Greater Impressionability.

Why did we find more significant differences from Time 1 to Time 2 among the elementary school children than among the middle school children? With the need to focus our research design and samples, we intentionally collected data from more elementary school children than from middle school children because we hypothesized from the outset that we might discern more differences among them due to their youth and greater impressionability vs. the middle schoolers who might be relatively more jaded at ages 12-14. We wanted to maximize the study's chances of demonstrating change where it indeed occurred.

Note also that the number of subjects for some analyses, totaled together, came to 202, 37 less than the total sample, this due to slight differences in the groups at Time 1 and Time 2. After all, between fall and spring, new children come into a school district, while others leave, and on any given day, some children are absent. For the strongest comparisons, we chose whenever possible to do **paired** t-tests which require that you look at precisely the same group at both observations. Hence, we necessarily lost some subjects in these analysis.

Appendix 5

A Hard Finding to Explain

Hypothetically Easier to Not View TV at Time 2

The elementary students were very significantly ($p < .001$) more likely at Time 2 than at Time 1 to *disagree* with the statement that "It would be hard for me to go a week without watching TV." In other words, these students seem to be saying that they believe they've gained more self-control over their viewing habit at Time 2 than at Time 1. The middle schoolers exhibited no difference on this measure.

It's not entirely clear to what we should attribute this finding. It may be that the media literacy curriculum has indeed helped these students understand their viewing habits, with the students now feeling they are in better control. We can't rule out, however, particularly on a value-laden variable such as this one that having received the curriculum the students could be giving what they believe to be the *socially desirable response*. It is also possible, but doubtful, that the maturation of 7-8 months of living has made them less dependent on TV. Although it is very important to point out that number of hours spent viewing did not drop for any group.

Evidence that the elementary school students *have* developed a more extreme impression of heavy viewing (vs. what the middle schoolers learned) is that it is *only* the elementary school children who estimated that kids in their own same rough age cohort (ages 8-14) viewed significantly ($p<.01$) more hours of TV each day, in the measure taken at Time 2 (4 hours) than the one taken at Time 1 (3.7 hours) (students were asked to estimate about how many hours a day, kids 8-14, watched television). This may be a sign of an "others watch an awful lot of TV but I don't watch as much" sort of consciousness growing in the younger kids, possibly a result of the media literacy curriculum they received. But more powerful evidence would be an actual drop in their own viewing levels and we did not see this in any group.

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